

Putting "Of," "For," and "By," Into Effect

Nonpartisan League Employs Political Machinery as Means to Execute Its Economic Program

By GEORGE L. CARLSON

THE National Nonpartisan League owes its existence to an economic theory of society, rather than to anything political, although it employs the political machinery of a state in order to carry out its economic program. Like almost all economic theories, its germ was created as a result of unjust economic conditions which made the life of its members unbearable, if not impossible, to endure. It is in no sense partisan, either in name or in practice, since it supports both Democrats and Republicans at all elections. All it asks of those whom it nominates and supports with its votes is to carry out its economic program; whether these call themselves Democrats or Republicans does not matter. In North Dakota, where it first came into public notice, and where it first gained the control of the political machinery of a state, the Republicans were in the majority, so that politically it is nominally Republican in that state. It is its non-political, and more particularly its nonpartisan character that gives to it the strength and chance for success which all politicians so much fear. Doubtless much of the opposition and much of the criticism of the organization are based on this fact.

An eminent British scholar once declared that the Americans were the greatest people in the world to discover old things. The National Nonpartisan League is a case in support of this Briton's declaration. I am unable to find anything in its aim or in the things it has done that has not been advocated by the press and by politicians for the past fifty years; that is to say, it has been advocated as a theory. It is another instance of the theories of governing classes being at variance with their practices. Theories are always harmless to all, merely as such, and they often win votes if advocated during an election campaign; but to put them into practice after the election is quite another thing. Moreover, these same theories which were so harmless before election may prove very dangerous to certain interests if taken seriously and acted upon after election. The real case against the members of the National Nonpartisan League seems to be that its members have a way of taking these theories seriously, and of reducing them to actual practice.

A most painstaking study of the subject reveals the fact that the only essential difference between the members of this organization and others is that the one formulates its promises and theories into laws, while the others do not. I am unable to find any other difference of note in an exhaustive study of their aims and practices.

The National Nonpartisan League Defined

DEFINITIONS are often little more than the expressed viewpoint of some individual. The people have been given all sorts of definitions of this organization, and all sorts of aims of the National Nonpartisan League have been attributed to it by newspaper writers. Those who are honestly in search of correct information concerning any organization, or who desire to know anything about certain theories of existence which may be advocated by any social group will do well to examine the charter of that organization, or the claims advanced by those who advocate the theory. In no other way can reliable information be obtained of the many organizations which advocate some new theory of life. Section two of the articles of association of the National Nonpartisan League contains all the information on this subject that ever has been given to the world. Of the nineteen sections comprising these articles, not a single word is used to express the aim of the League, other than the three aims expressed in section two. This section reads as follows: The purposes for which this association is formed are:

- (1) Making government responsive to the will of the people: government of the people.
- (2) Eradicating special privilege; purifying government; improving the general welfare of the people: government for the people.
- (3) Raising the standard of citizenship; disseminating knowledge of the rights, powers and duties of citizens in relation to government: government by the people.

Readers of the public press will find nothing new in these aims as expressed by the League itself. For fifty years the newspapers have been printing and acclaiming the beauties and excellencies of such aims, even as politicians have shouted themselves out of voice in advocating them. The thing new about them, and the one thing which causes us to take notice of them at this time, and to be more or less concerned about them, is that now we actually fear that these highly altruistic aims, which we have been advocating for half a century, are going to be put to work. We had fallen into that state of mind which caused us to believe that such aims were only to be mentioned on special occasions, such as election campaigns, and now for any economic or social group to take them up and put them to work is more than the average mind can endure. A government of, for, and by the people, is a most beautiful theory to speak of, and to write about; but the plain truth is that mighty few of us believe in any such theory. It is because of this that we are either surprised or shocked when a body of men reduce the theory to actual practice. By long association with the idea that it was a theory only, we formed the habit of believing that it could be nothing more than a theory, and now to see a body of men convert the theory into the most practical statesmanship is at first rather shocking, as it is later most disconcerting to many of our plans and ambitions.

The majority of writers on subjects pertaining to

East Thinks League Anarchic Not Understanding Its Work

Mr. Carlson's letter as to the impressions the East has of the National Nonpartisan League is most interesting and for that reason is reproduced below:

During a recent tour of the East, I was often surprised and occasionally shocked by questions asked me regarding the National Nonpartisan League. Many otherwise intelligent persons seem to take it for granted that this organization of farmers is composed of anarchists and other undesirables.

This suggested to me the timeliness of an article to treat of the causes which gave birth to this organization, of its aims, what it has accomplished.

By using the names of leaders in this movement I could have given the article a larger human interest, but as this is a year of deep political interest to many persons, I was convinced that any use of names would reduce the article to mere propaganda in the minds of many readers. I am not a member of this organization, nor of any political organization. I am not even a farmer, and I am not interested in propaganda of any kind, unless dealing in facts and being interested in a general human progress be regarded as such.

social aims and theories are now agreed that no social theory ever has originated in the mind of any man, except as a result of some need first having been felt for that particular theory. To a certain extent this is but a confirmation of the utilitarian conception of society which originated with the early Greeks, and later was advocated by eminent writers, such as Rousseau and Spencer. As an economic group, the National Nonpartisan League is composed wholly of farmers.

While every agency that handled the products of the farmer until they reached the ultimate consumer has been making large profits, the farmer who produced these products has not been allowed to have any income for his labor. Thinking men ought to know that such conditions cannot go on forever. Under such conditions tenancy has been increasing at a most alarming rate in the farming areas of the country, and in the newer states the farms were rapidly falling into the ownership of nonresidents, as a result of mortgage foreclosures. It required a world crisis to arouse the public mind to the fearful condition of American agriculture, and not until this crisis gave to the farmer a just price for his products, was it possible longer to keep the youth of the rural districts on the farms. Briefly stated, these are the conditions which gave birth to the National Nonpartisan League.

What the League has Accomplished

MANY most excellent economic and social theories have been advanced at various periods in the history of the race, but because of a lack of proper organization and leadership, the people have never derived any advantage from them. Most good theories fail because of this lack of organization and leadership on the part of the producers and workers, while those who oppose them are already organized by reason of their political power and their control of the agencies of publicity. The grange, farmers' congresses, and other movements for bettering the economic and social condition of the agricultural classes, have failed to benefit these classes and to abolish the evils of which they have so long complained, only because those who opposed any measure for the relief sought soon gained control of all such organizations. Farmers' congresses have become conspicuous for their lack of members who are real farmers. The National Nonpartisan League and the Farmers' Educational and Co-operative Union seem to be the only farmer organizations that are so organized as to be able to control themselves, and to accomplish anything of real value to their memberships.

In a study of a subject so fraught with great possibilities, whether or not we approve of an organization or of its policies, it is well to keep our minds on the main points, rather than to be misled by too much harping on the details. The main points are the causes which made the organization necessary, what might have taken place instead, what it has already accomplished, and the type of men comprising its membership. The chief causes for its existence have been briefly described. When we view the present condition of the world mind, how anarchy reigns among at least half the peoples of the world, it is fortunate indeed for the United States that we have a National Nonpartisan League to correct the political abuses and economic injustices of the nation, rather than any other of the new organizations which seem to breed chaos

and disorder, rather than to bring harmony and contentment out of the chaos already existing.

In the Old World it is largely the forms of privilege born of autocratic power that are responsible for present conditions, whereas in the United States it is privilege born of modern industry. The difference in the conditions and in the remedies advocated are the best endorsements of democracy which it has ever gained. In the Old World under autocracy, where discussion has been largely out of form, revolution is the remedy; whereas here under a democracy which tolerates discussion, and which teaches legality and order, evolution is the remedy. Regarded solely from the standpoint of what it has accomplished in so short a time, the National Nonpartisan League is the most revolutionary organization known in all our existence as a nation, yet all that it has accomplished has been done in strict accordance with the established law of the states, and in an orderly manner, and by methods that are so open and honorable that no political party dares to make a comparison with its own methods. This is the main point to be remembered, the one outstanding fact which should cause all to be fair in their criticisms until such time as there is evidence that the League is not living up to its principles as given to the public.

Since the organization of the League, in 1916, it has gained control of the political machinery of only one state, that of North Dakota. It has in the short space of three years enacted more constructive legislation in this one state than ever has been enacted by the legislatures of any other state in twenty years of legislation. The only question that is difficult to answer, of all the many questions which such a momentous subject suggests, is how any body of men could possibly do so much constructive work in enacting needed laws, in so short a time.

Out of this large list of constructive laws may be mentioned: railroad laws compelling railroads to furnish cars to all shippers alike, to furnish sidetracks at coal mines, and to pay their employees twice each month; the best co-operative corporation law in the United States; laws expediting the trial of court cases and reducing the cost of litigation; laws combining political offices; laws prohibiting discrimination between localities in the prices paid for products; laws creating a dairy commission, licensing creameries, and for uniform tests of milk and cream; laws for building state-owned warehouses, packing houses, dipping tanks for live stock, and grain elevators; laws for weighing and grading of all farm products, and for conducting experiments at the state college to determine the value of the various grades of grain; laws for standardizing rural schools, for establishing evening schools, and for county agricultural training schools, and welfare laws; laws giving the state control of credits and interest rates, guaranteeing of bank deposits, tax laws classifying property for taxation in which taxes are lowered on improvements and increased on land; and laws which make it possible for all workers to own their homes.

Whatever one's opinion of the League may be, the fact remains that it has given to the state of North Dakota the most just and progressive laws ever enacted by a legislature in this country. There is nothing narrow, no evidence of class consciousness, nothing destructive to be seen in any part of the program as completed, unless it be the destruction of privilege that ought to be destroyed in every state, and in every nation. These are only a small part of the laws enacted by two North Dakota legislatures, only one of which was composed of a majority, in both chambers thereof, of members of the League. The state constitution also has been amended to remove many restrictions to further progress. This program will serve as a model for other states to imitate in years to come.

The Membership of the League

THE League is primarily an organization of farmers, and it is doubtful if it ever will be made to include any other economic or social group. If economic and industrial conditions in this country continue as bad as they now are, there is a possibility of labor uniting with it for purely political purposes, but socially they will never fuse, any more than will oil and water. The more probable outcome is for labor to do as the farmers have done, and to organize themselves for political action. As a social group there is no other hope for them, if they are to make any social progress worth mentioning.

The farmer does little talking, but he is the best thinker of all social groups in every country. This is not because he differs from other groups as a mere man, but wholly because of his environment. His work both inspires and permits thinking as does no other occupation of man. Coming in close contact with nature in all he does makes the farmer a keen and accurate observer. It is his close contact with nature, and the fact that his success depends very largely upon a knowledge of natural phenomena that make the farmer the best informed of all social groups, and that have developed sound judgment at the expense of superficial knowledge. Our political and social institutions are responsible for making the farmers of this country more progressive, and even better informed, than those of any other. European travelers of the highest intelligence and culture have declared that the American farmers, particularly those of the great grain-growing states of the upper Mississippi and Missouri river plains, are the best informed as a class of any they have ever met. As an individual the farmer is conservative. He is never impatient, for his mind has been trained to depend upon the processes of nature,

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